



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
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Legislative cuts to require job reductions at institutions for people with disabilities

Carrying out legislative direction to reduce mid-management positions and reduce operating costs at five residential institutions for people with developmental disabilities, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has notified employees and interested members of the public of 55 staff positions planned for reduction over the next two years.

The staff reduction will save \$3.7 million over the next two years, as directed by the Legislature in the new budget for state government. At the same time, the Legislature increased the DSHS budget to provide more support to people with developmental disabilities in their communities.

All together, DSHS employs 2,572 people and has annual operating costs of \$319 million at the five RHCs – Rainier School in Buckley, Fircrest School in Shoreline, Lakeland Village in Medical Lake, the Yakima Valley School in Selah and Frances Haddon Morgan School in Bremerton.

Linda Johnson, office chief in the DSHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), explained the budget cuts can only be achieved by reducing the number of employees at the institutions, which are known as Residential Habilitation Centers (RHCs).

“Staff costs represent from 80 to 90 percent of the budgets of the RHCs, which means we will have to distribute the residents more efficiently at two of the institutions—Rainier and Fircrest.” Johnson said.

“Fircrest and Rainier are the two largest RHCs and they will have to take the largest staff cuts,” Johnson explained.

She also noted that the Legislature in 2003 directed DSHS to downsize Fircrest School and consolidate vacancies at all the RHCs. As a result, four Fircrest cottages closed and the resident population dropped from approximately 250 people to 194. The former Fircrest residents moved to the other RHCs, community-based housing or to nursing facilities.

Johnson said that most of the vacant positions at the institutions were eliminated in the last biennium to reduce their workforces by 118 positions during the downsizing and consolidation process. She emphasized any vacant positions will be eliminated before reductions in force go into effect in upcoming months.

Here's a breakdown of the new staff reductions at the five RHCs that will occur on or before Oct. 1:

- **Firecrest School (Shoreline):** 28 positions
- **Rainier School (Buckley):** 18 positions
- **Lakeland Village (Medical Lake):** six positions
- **Yakima Valley School (Selah):** two positions
- **Frances Haddon Morgan School (Bremerton):** one middle management cut in 2006

While directing DSHS to reduce funding for the RHCs, the Legislature also provided funding for community residential placements and support services for up to 80 clients. Funding also was provided to expand employment and day services for 600 more people with developmental disabilities and increased the personal needs allowance for clients from \$41.62 per month to \$51.62.

At their peak in 1967, 4,145 people with developmental disabilities lived in the state's six RHCs operating then.

Now fewer than 1,000 of the state's 33,000 clients with developmental disabilities live in the five institutions. Ninety-seven percent of all people in the state served by DDD live in their communities.

Last year, \$319 million - about 33 percent - of the DDD budget was spent on the 1,000 residents who reside in the RHCs. Forty-three percent, or \$399 million, went to community-based services and 24 percent, or \$234 million, went to people receiving services in their homes.

The population of people living in the RHCs has been dropping steadily for several reasons. The civil rights movement has inspired people with developmental disabilities, supported by families and guardians, to seek housing, jobs, and activities in their own communities rather than going to institutions.

In addition, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Olmstead v L.C.* that states must place people with disabilities in community settings rather than institutions when it is appropriate. Currently, 75 percent of people with diagnoses of severe or profound mental retardation live in the community, as do an even higher percentage of people who are less profoundly disabled.

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